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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 001056

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA, DRL A/AS FOR JONATHAN FARRAR

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TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT ACADEMICS LABEL CUBA'S EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM A FAILURE

REF: HAVANA 1029

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Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: On 3 November 72 independent academics from all parts of Cuba attended a conference organized by Roberto de Miranda in his home in central Havana. They discussed all aspects of the state education system. The teachers and professors concluded that despite the government's commitment to universal free and public education, the system has been a colossal failure. They cited as the largest problems the low pay and poor training for teachers and the fact that the system emphasizes political indoctrination at the expense of academic achievement. The attendees agreed to continue to advocate vigorously for educational reform in Cuba. End Summary.

12. (C) Roberto de Miranda, founder of the first independent library and Cuba and one of the 75 dissidents arrested in the crackdown of 2003, has long been a champion of professors and teachers fired for political reasons. He organized on 3 November an all day conference at his house of independent academics because he believes that a thorough reform of the educational system is essential for the success any transition to democracy. He was able to attract 72 academics representing every part of the island. Participants represented a broad spectrum of points of view, including a number of people who were not involved in specific political activity but had run afoul of the regime for pursuing lines of inquiry that the regime considers embarrassing.

13. (C) Four working groups were established dealing with primary education, secondary and vocational education, higher education and special education. Each group covered a broad range of topics including teacher education, rural education and education in the arts. Throughout the day there was lively debate, but a consensus emerged on the main defects of the present system.

14. (C) Many expressed that due to the low salaries the government has not been able to recruit or retain an adequate number of trained and motivated teachers. Jose Manuel de la Rosa Perez of Santiago de Cuba presented a series of statistics that nearly 90% of the country's educators were living in poverty, 16% of those in extreme poverty. Participants told many stories of teachers leaving the profession to work menial jobs. From all over the country people presented cases of schools filled with unmotivated teachers who had no knowledge of teaching techniques and no skill in dealing with children.

15. (C) Several teachers also spoke about the many dilapidated school buildings and the lack of basic materials such as pens and notebooks. Throughout the country high school science labs have little or no equipment. Elcida Ines Cuba from Sancti Spiritus stated that while some poor countries have made it a priority to make students computer literate, Cuba not only lacks resources but the government fears high technology and does not want the population to access outside information. Elcida also stated that in Sancti Spiritus at least 1000 local students have been refused places in the medical school to make room for foreigners, mainly Venezuelans and Mexicans.

16. (C) A frequent theme was how the government places emphasis on political indoctrination rather than the acquisition of knowledge. Political activity and military style training consume a good part of the school day. Although the regime has showcased its achievements in providing free and universal education, Professor Juan Carlos Blamenti Valladares stated that the results have been a vast mediocrity. University admission is more the result of participation in political activities rather than scholastic

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achievement. Roberto de Miranda has a list of over 300 teachers and professors, many with excellent credentials, fired from their position for either political reasons or the display of independent thinking. Many promising students have been expelled from university solely out of political reasons. One of these expelled students Yuri Perez is trying to get UNESCO to condemn Cuba for the practice of expelling teachers and students for political motives. Overall participants in the conference very much wanted international recognition of the persecution of teachers and students in Cuba for their ideas.

15. (C) Another common theme was the failure of the socialist government to create "the new man". Many commented that the younger generation is largely embittered, cynical and lacking in a basic sense of ethics. In all the panels there was a discussion of trying to integrate an education in values into the system. Many proposed pressuring the authorities to allow the Catholic Church to reopen its schools, and other religious groups to be able to establish private schools.

16. (C) Ludis Rodriguez Dias and Martha Rivas, two people who were going to the conference from Mazanillo, were stopped by state security agents in Camaguey and sent home. Three police cars were parked in front of De Miranda's home for a week before the conference. However, in no other instances did police harass or confront participants of the conference.

17. (C) Comment and Action Recommended: This is a significant example of a grassroots effort organized by Cubans to lay the groundwork for democratic reform. The group stated that they were confident that Cuban parents valued education and that there is widespread support for their efforts. They also appear emboldened by the lack of

hard repression on the part of the security forces in dealing with some recent protests. At this point the participants hope that they can raise awareness in the international community of the grave problems in the Cuban educational system. We believe this is precisely the type of effort we should be supporting with tools like internet access and scholarship offers mentioned by the President in his Oct. 24 speech.

PARMLY